Counting Down: Looking Ahead to GEO Business 2017

Leading organisations from across the geospatial industry, including Ordnance Survey, Google, HS2, Department of Transport, ARUP, Esri, AGI, and the RICS, will feature prominently in the GEO Business 2017 Conference programme. Returning to the Business Design Centre in London, next month (from 23-24 May), the UK's biggest geospatial exhibition and conference of the year has unveiled a raft of big-name speakers for its 2017 event.

Innovation, efficiency, resilience, automation, BIM standards, digital engineering, infrastructure design and investment, smart technology, the implications of Brexit, and future predictions are just some of the topics under discussion.

To have many of the profession's leading innovators and key thinkers together under one roof is what makes GEO Business so incredibly valuable to its visitors, said show director Caroline Hobden. This year's conference offers an unrivalled opportunity to exchange global information about the latest geospatial technologies, research and services, backed by real-world commercial applications. Over two days, expert presenters will explore where the geospatial industry is right now, what challenges and opportunities are ahead, and what trends will be shaping it in the years to come, Hobden added.

With this year's conference registration fees starting from as little as GBP15 per day, it really is fantastic value for the sheer amount of knowledge, best practice advice and ideas available here, she continued.

Digital innovation for geomatics

The conference opens with a session dedicated to 'Defining and delivering a spatially-enabled economy', featuring presentations from Nigel Clifford, CEO of Ordnance Survey; Stuart Martin, CEO of the Satellite Applications Catapult; and Charles Kennelly, CTO of Esri (UK). These key influencers from the public and private sector, representing both suppliers and consumers of location information, will each offer their perspectives on how digital geospatial strategy can support and sustain economic growth and stability – covering everything from civil contingency, and adapting to climate change, to national security.

Technological advances in the form of a plethora of new earth observation satellites, drones and street view data capture platforms, advances in robotics, big data predictive analytics and 'people as sensors', are just a few of the innovations at their disposal,said Clifford. It's a new golden age for geography. Combining multi sensor, multi source data, with predictive analytics, to enable better real time decisions in the c-suite and Government offices.

The next wave of sessions on opening day sees Brent Jones from Esri USA, Peter Beaumont from HERE, and Jens Peder Kristensen from TinyMobileRobots in Denmark discuss the latest 'Innovations and disruptive geospatial solutions'; Dan Palmer from British Standards Institution (BSI UK), Phil Jackson from Building Smart, and Scott Simmons from Open Geospatial Consortium, make the case for "The importance of standards in a data centric world; while a UK government security engineer and RealSim's director Gavin Duffy discuss wider world 'spin offs', such as digital engineering and geospatial game engines respectively.

Infrastructure projects & asset management

National Infrastructure Commission member Sadie Morgan, design panel chair of High Speed Two and founding director of dRMM Architects heads up day two's stellar line-up. Her opening Keynote 'Infrastructure investment at the heart of a new industrial strategy for a post-Brexit UK' is set identify and explain the government's investment priorities ahead (including further investment in transport, energy and communications infrastructure, and the construction of a million new homes by 2020). She'll draw on her work with the HS2 project and share her views on the need to drive investment in good design, innovation and technology to ensure that the UK infrastructure planning delivery have the skills needed to embrace the future.

Morgan will also be appearing in an exclusive panel discussing 'developing a strategy for smart infrastructure', alongside Dr Jennifer Schooling, director of the University of Cambridge's Centre for Smart Infrastructure and Construction; Nic Cary, head of data policy in the central research team at the Department for Transport; and Tim Chapman, leader of Arup's infrastructure London group.

The construction industry is about to enter an era of profound change – with it encountering, potentially, the biggest changes since the time of the Brunels, said Chapman, speaking ahead of the show. He believes that the impact of new technologies – particularly automation – within the next decade will be far-reaching and could see a huge amount of our established procedures…gone for ever.

The key change, which will have a profound effect, is automation of everything, from artificially intelligent computers doing design, to analysis plucking big data from the cloud, to robots operating on sites that resemble high precision factories. These trends will engulf us

all and make our industry hugely more efficient and productive but, Chapmans cautions, will also restrict choice for clients and could inhibit the careers of our industry members.

For now, his predictions are just that. And Sadie Morgan, Nic Cary and Dr Jennifer Schooling will have their own to add on Wednesday 24 May. Chapman said he is looking forward to listening to other practitioners at GEO Business extolling their competing visions for the future and seeing what consensus emerges.

Other second day highlights

Other second day highlights include sessions dedicated to 'Innovations in land and property management', featuring expert digital consultant Jos Creese, immediate past president of BCS – the Chartered Institute for IT; Simon Navin from Ordnance Survey; and Andreas Schulze Bäing, a lecturer in urban planning at the University of Manchester.

The final session of the day at this year's show, is open to all visitors. It's the free-to-attend GEO Business Question Time. Tackling perhaps the biggest question of all – 'What is the future of the geospatial industry?' are panellists Ed Manley, lecturer in smart cities at the University College London's Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA); Miranda Sharp, head of smart cities practice at Ordnance Survey; Ed Parsons, geospatial technologist at Google; and Mike Hopkins, representing The Survey Association.

This is a great opportunity for our profession to pause for a moment and look into the future and perhaps realise what sort of shape our businesses need to be in to be able to embrace the huge leaps in technology that are forecasted, said Hopkins.

Like many of the show's visitors, speakers and exhibitors, he's looking forward to "experiencing the buzz in our growing profession, alongside colleagues, customers and competitors" at the show.

The confirmed programme is available to view online.